Planning Board
City of Alameda
Alameda, CA
By Email

March 5, 2020

To Planning Board

RE: Permit for Solar Array at Assessors Parcel 174-1040-001-00

Because of the concerns with climate change and the need to switch to renewal sources for power generation, we support the construction of a solar array on 11 acres of this parcel of land, the former landfill located northwest of the intersection of Doolittle Drive and Harbor Bay Parkway on Bay Farm Island in Alameda.

However, we have two concerns with the biological review. While no Burrowing Owls were seen during the field visit, Burrowing Owls have been reported at this site, in addition to the reports noted in the review of Burrowing Owls at the nearby Martin Luther King Jr Regional Shoreline. In addition, the biological report indicates the belief that Burrowing Owls would not use the site because of the presence nearby of trees on which raptors might perch, but Burrowing Owls are known to inhabit areas within sight of trees or other tall structures on which raptors might perch. Great Horned Owl is also known to use the site during all or parts of the year, and was seen as recently as February of this year. We therefore conclude that a more thorough biological investigation of the site is needed. Because of time constraints, we have not reviewed data from the multiple Christmas Bird Counts that have included the Chuck Corica Golf Course that is across Doolittle Drive from this site, but would be happy to provide the information to whoever would be doing an expanded biological review.

There are few studies of bird mortality at small solar energy sites. One study of a large facility with a different solar collection method than this proposed array found approximately two bird deaths per week. *Avian Mortality at a Solar Energy Power Plant;* McCrary, Mckernan, Schreiber, Wagner and Sciarrotta. Another study. of three large solar energy facilities in Southern California, two with collection methods quite different from the method to be used here, documented three types of dangers. *Avian Mortality at Solar Energy Facilities in Southern California: a Preliminary Analysis*; Kagan, Viner, Trail, Espinoza, National Fish and Wildlife Forensic Laboratory. Birds at the site using a similar generation method but at a larger facility died from two causes, from impact injuries and from predation resulting when a bird was weakened by an impact injury. Because of the difference in facility sizes, the extent of the risk from this facility is unclear. We therefore recommend that the project sponsor conduct a periodic study of possible bird injuries and deaths when the facility is operational and determine whether mitigation might be necessary.

We also note that the site is adjacent to waterways, including Doolittle Pond right next door to the site. According to the eBird database (hosted by Cornell Lab of Ornithology), over 126 species of

birds have been sited, including ducks, wading birds, and terrestrial songbirds. This data can be viewed at https://ebird.org/hotspot/L803630. While the data were reported from larger solar farms with closely spaced panels, there is some indication that water birds have difficulty distinguishing the reflective solar panels from actual water. In addition, solar panels can create the same reflection danger as windows, which have been mitigated recently by the City's Bird-Safe Buildings ordinance. Therefore, we conclude that there is a need to determine whether this smaller solar array might create the same dangers and, if so, develop design alternatives to address the problem. If a design modification is not available, then a mitigation strategy would be the next alternative to consider.

We urge the Planning Board to consider these comments and request that the developer address them before a permit is issued, but anticipate that solutions can be developed fairly quickly so that additional solar power becomes available to Alameda residents.

Sincerely,

Alameda Residents Linda Carloni, Leora Feeney, Marjorie Powell

Avian Mortality at Solar Energy Facilities in Southern California: A Preliminary Analysis

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National Fish and Wildlife Forensics Laboratory

Executive Summary

This report summarizes data on bird mortality at three solar energy facilities in southern California: Desert Sunlight, Genesis, and Ivanpah. These facilities use different solar technologies, but avian mortality was documented at each site. Desert Sunlight is a photovoltaic facility, Genesis employs a trough system with parabolic mirrors, and Ivanpah uses a power tower as a focal point for solar flux.

FINDINGS

Trauma was the leading cause of death documented for remains at the Desert Sunlight and Genesis sites. Trauma and solar flux injury were both major causes of mortality at the Ivanpah site. Exposure to solar flux caused singeing of feathers, which resulted in mortality in several ways. Severe singeing of flight feathers caused catastrophic loss of flying ability, leading to death by impact with the ground or other objects. Less severe singeing led to impairment of flight capability, reducing ability to forage and evade predators, leading to starvation or predation. Our examinations did not find evidence for significant tissue burns or eye damage caused by exposure to solar flux.

Cause of Death	Ivanpah	Genesis	Desert Sunlight	Total
Solar Flux	47	0	0	47
Impact trauma	24	6	19	49
Predation trauma	5	2	15	22
Trauma of undetermined cause	14	0	0	14
Electrocution	1	0	0	1
Emaciation	1	0	0	1
Undetermined (remains in poor condition)	46	17	22	85
No evident cause of death	3	6	5	14
Total	141	31	61	233

These solar facilities appear to represent "equal-opportunity" hazards for the bird species that encounter them. The remains of 71 species were identified, representing a broad range of ecological types. In body size, these ranged from hummingbirds to pelicans; in ecological type from strictly aerial feeders

(swallows) to strictly aquatic feeders (grebes) to ground feeders (roadrunners) to raptors (hawks and owls). The species identified were equally divided among resident and non-resident species, and nocturnal as well as diurnal species were represented. Although not analyzed in detail, there was also significant bat and insect mortality at the Ivanpah site, including monarch butterflies. It appears that Ivanpah may act as a **"mega-trap,"** attracting insects which in turn attract insect-eating birds, which are incapacitated by solar flux injury, thus attracting predators and creating an entire food chain vulnerable to injury and death.

			Foraging Zone			Residency Status	
SITE	No. Remains	Identifiable Remains	Air	Terr	Water	Resident	Migrant
Ivanpah	141	127	28	85	14	63	64
Genesis	31	30	12	12	6	20	10
Desert Sun	61	56	7	22	27	18	38
TOTALS	233	213	47	119	47	101	112

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, three main causes of avian mortality were identified at these facilities: impact trauma, solar flux, and predation. Birds at all three types of solar plants were susceptible to impact trauma and predators. Predation was documented mostly at the photovoltaic site, and in many cases appeared to be associated with stranding or nonfatal impact trauma with the panels, leaving birds vulnerable to resident predators. Solar flux injury, resulting from exposures to up to 800° F, was unique to the power tower facility. Our findings demonstrate that a broad ecological variety of birds are vulnerable to morbidity and mortality at solar facilities, though some differential mortality trends were evident, such as waterbirds at Desert Sunlight, where open water sources were present; and insectivores at Ivanpah, where insects are attracted to the solar tower.

Specific hazards were identified, including vertically-oriented mirrors or other smooth reflective panels; water-like reflective or polarizing panels; actively fluxing towers; open bodies of water; aggregations of insects that attracted insectivorous birds; and resident predators. Making towers, ponds and panels less attractive or accessible to birds may mitigate deaths. Specific actions should include:

Monitoring/detection measures:

1) Install video cameras sufficient to provide 360 degree coverage around each tower to record birds (and bats) entering and exiting the flux

2) For at least two years (and in addition to planned monitoring protocol), conduct daily surveys for birds (at all three facilities), as well as insects and bats (in the condenser building at Ivanpah) around each tower at the base of and immediately adjacent to the towers in the area cleared of vegetation. Timing of daily surveys can be adjusted to minimize scavenger removal of carcasses as recommended by the TAC. Surveys in the late afternoon might be optimal for bird carcasses, and first light for bat carcasses.

3) Use dogs for monitoring surveys to detect dead and injured birds that have hidden themselves in the brush, both inside and outside the perimeter of the facility

4) To decrease removal of carcasses, implement appropriate raven deterrent actions

Bird Mortality Avoidance Measures:

1) Increase cleared area around tower at Ivanpah to decrease attractive habitat; at least out to fence

2) Retrofit visual cues to existing panels at all three facilities and incorporate into new panel design. These cues should include UV-reflective or solid, contrasting bands spaced no further than 28 cm from each other

3) Suspend power tower operation during peak migration times for indicated species

4) Avoid vertical orientation of mirrors whenever possible, for example tilt mirrors during washing

5) Properly net or otherwise cover ponds

6) Place perch deterrent devices where indicated, eg. on tower railings near the flux field

7) Employ exclusionary measures to prevent bats from roosting in and around the condenser facility at Ivanpah.

It must be emphasized that we currently have a very incomplete knowledge of the scope of avian mortality at these solar facilities. Challenges to data collection include: large facilities which are difficult to efficiently search for carcasses; vegetation and panels obscuring ground visibility; carcass loss due to scavenging; rapid degradation of carcass quality hindering cause of death and species determination; and inconsistent documentation of carcass history.

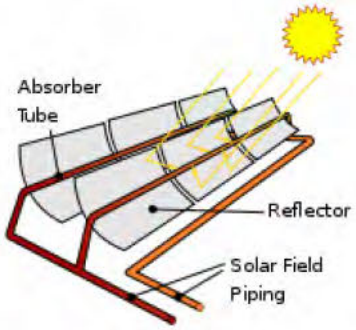
To rectify this problem, video cameras should be added to the solar towers to record bird mortality and daily surveys of the area at the base of and immediately adjacent to the towers should be conducted. At all the facilities, a protocol for systematic, statistically-rigorous searches for avian remains should be developed, emphasizing those areas where avian mortality is most likely to occur. Investigation into bat and insect mortalities at the power tower site should also be pursued.

Finally, there are presently little data available on how solar flux affects birds and insects. Studies of the temperatures experienced by objects in the flux; of the effects of high temperatures on feather structure and function; and of the behavior of insects and birds in response to the flux and related phenomena (e.g. "light clouds") are all essential if we are to understand the scope of solar facility effects on wildlife.

Introduction

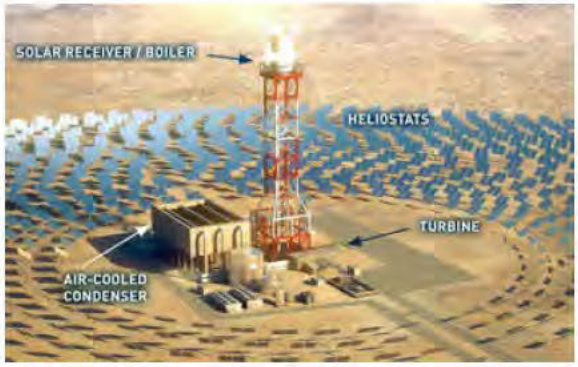
The National Fish and Wildlife Forensics Laboratory was requested to determine cause of death for birds found at facilities that generate electricity from solar energy. Solar generating facilities can be classified into three major types: photovoltaic sites, trough systems and solar power towers. There is much written about these systems so this report will not include any technical details, but simply mention the differences and their potential impact on birds.

1) **Photovoltaic systems** directly convert the sun's light into electricity. The perceived threat to birds is associated with the presence of water ponds which attract birds and from traumatic impact with the photovoltaic cells. An example of this type of solar power plant is Desert Sunlight Solar Farm (AKA First Solar).



2) **Trough systems** are composed of parabolic mirrors which focus and reflect the sun to a tube that converts the heat from the sun into electricity. The perceived threat to birds is associated with the presence of water ponds which attract birds and from traumatic impact with the trough structures. An example of this type of solar power plant is Genesis Solar Energy Project.

3) **Solar power towers** use thousands of mirrors to reflect the solar energy to a tower, where water in a boiler is converted to steam, generating the electricity. The perceived threat to birds is associated traumatic impact with the mirrors and the danger associated with the heat produced by the mirrors. An example of this type of solar power plant is Ivanpah Solar Electric Generating System.



Methods

Carcasses were collected at the different solar power plant sites by either US Fish and Wildlife Service employees or by energy company staff. The collection of the carcasses was opportunistic; that is, not according to a pre-determined sampling schedule or protocol. There was no attempt to quantify the number of carcasses that scavengers or predators removed from the solar facilities' grounds, or to compare the distribution of carcasses inside and outside the boundaries of the solar facility sites.

Additionally, three USFWS/-OLE staff, including two Forensics Lab staff (EOE and RAK), visited the Ivanpah Solar plant from October 21 – 24, 2013. Their on-site observations are included in this report.

A total of 233 birds collected from three different facilities were examined; 141 from a solar thermal power tower site (Ivanpah, Bright Source Inc.), 31 from a parabolic trough site (Genesis, NextEra Energy Inc.) and 61 from a photovoltaic (PV) panel site (Desert Sunlight, First Solar Inc.). Nine of the Ivanpah birds were received fresh; 7 of those were necropsied during a site visit by a Forensics Laboratory pathologist (RAK). The rest of the birds were received frozen and allowed to thaw at room temperature prior to species identification and necropsy. Species determination was made by the Forensics Laboratory ornithologist (PWT) for all birds either prior to necropsy or, for those necropsied on-site, from photos and the formalin-fixed head. All data on carcass history (location of the carcass, date of collection and any additional observations) were transcribed, although these were not available for all carcasses.

As part of the gross pathological examination, whole carcasses were radiographed to help evaluate limb fractures and identify any metal foreign bodies. Alternate light source examination using an Omnichrome Spectrum 9000+ at 570 nm with a red filter helped rule in or out feather burns by highlighting subtle areas of feather charring (Viner et al., 2014). All birds or bird parts from Ivanpah without obvious burns were examined with the alternate light source, as well as any bird reportedly found near a power line and a random sub-sample of the remaining birds from Genesis and Desert Sunlight (Viner, T. C., R. A. Kagan, and J. L. Johnson, 2014, Using an alternate light source to detect electrically singed feathers and hair in a forensic setting. Forensic Science International, v. 234, p. e25-e29).

Carcass quality varied markedly. If carcasses were in good post mortem condition, representative sections of heart, lung, kidney, liver, brain and gastrointestinal tract as well as any tissues with gross lesions were collected and fixed in 10% buffered formalin. Full tissue sets were collected from the fresh specimens. Formalin-fixed tissues were routinely processed for histopathology, paraffin-embedded, cut at 4 µm and stained with hematoxylin and eosin. Tissues from 63 birds were examined microscopically: 41 from Ivanpah, 1 from Genesis and 21 from Desert Sunlight.

Birds with feather burns were graded based on the extent of the lesions. Grade 1 birds had curling of less than 50% of the flight feathers. Grade 2 birds had curling of 50% or more of the flight feathers. Grade 3 birds had curling and visible charring of contour feathers (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Three grades of flux injury based on extent and severity of burning. Grade 1 (top); Yellow-rumped Warbler with less than 50% of the flight feathers affected (note sparing of the yellow rump feathers). Grade 2 (middle); Northern Rough-winged Swallow initially found alive but unable to fly, with greater than 50% of the flight feathers affected. Grade 3 (bottom); MacGillivray's Warbler with charring of feathers around the head, neck, wings and tail.

Bird Species Recovered at Solar Power Facilities

Tables 1-4 and Appendix 1 summarize 211 identifiable bird remains recovered from the three solar facilities included in this study. These birds constitute a taxonomically diverse assemblage of 71 species, representing a broad range of ecological types. In body size, these species ranged from hummingbirds to pelicans; in ecological type from strictly aerial feeders (e.g. swifts and swallows) to strictly aquatic feeders (pelicans and cormorants) to ground feeders (roadrunners) to raptors (hawks and owls). The species identified were equally divided among resident and non-resident species. Nocturnal as well as diurnal species were represented.

In Tables 1-4 and Appendix 1, bird species are categorized into very general ecological types by foraging zone and residency status. Foraging Zones were "air" (a significant portion of foraging activity performed in the air), "terrestrial" (including foraging both in vegetation and on the ground), and "water" (foraging associated with water, including waders as well as aquatic birds). Residency Status was "resident" (for breeding or year-round residents) and "migrant" (for both passage migrants and non-breeding-season residents). For a number of species, the appropriate classification for residency status was uncertain, due to a lack of detailed knowledge of the sites. The present classification is based on published range maps, and is subject to revision as more information becomes available.

This dataset is not suitable for statistical analysis, due to the opportunistic and unstandardized collection of avian remains at the facilities, and the lack of baseline data on bird diversity and abundance at each site. Nevertheless, a few conclusions can be noted. First, these data do not support the idea that these solar facilities are attracting particular species. Of the 71 bird species identified in remains, only five species were recovered from all three sites. These five were American Coot, Mourning Dove, Lesser Nighthawk, Tree Swallow, and Brown-headed Cowbird, again emphasizing the ecological variety of birds vulnerable to mortality at the solar facilities. Over two-thirds (67%) of the species were found at only a single site

(Appendix 1). That being said, the Desert Sunlight facility had particularly high mortality among waterbirds, suggesting a need to render the ponds at that site inaccessible or unattractive to these species.

The diversity of birds dying at these solar facilities, and the differences among sites, suggest that there is no simple "fix" to reduce avian mortality. These sites appear to represent "equal-opportunity" mortality hazards for the bird species that encounter them. Actions to reduce or mitigate avian mortality at solar facilities will need to be designed on a site-specific basis, and will require much more data on the bird communities at each site, and on how mortality is occurring. Carefully-designed mortality studies might reveal significant patterns of vulnerability that are not evident in these data.

Table 1. Summary data on avian mortality at the three solar sites included in this study. See summary for discussion of Foraging Zone and Residency Status categories.

				Foraging Zone			Residency Status	
SITE	**No. Species**	**No. Remains**	**Identifiable Remains**	**Air**	**Terr**	**Water**	**Resident**	**Migrant**
Ivanpah	49	141	127	26	85	14	63	64
Genesis	15	31	30	12	12	6	20	10
Desert Sun	33	61	56	7	22	27	18	38
TOTALS	71	233	213	47	119	47	101	112

Table 2. Species identified from avian remains at the Desert Sunlight photovoltaic solar facility. MNI = minimum number of individuals of each species represented by the identifiable remains. In some cases (e.g. Cinnamon/Blue-winged Teal), closely related species could not be distinguished based on the available remains, but the Foraging Zone and Residency Status could still be coded, due to the ecological similarities of the species involved. Total identified birds = 56.

DESERT SUNLIGHT		Zone	Residency	MNI
Pied-billed Grebe	*Podilymbus podiceps*	water	migrant	1
Eared Grebe	*Podiceps nigricollis*	water	migrant	3
Sora	*Porzana carolina*	water	migrant	1
American Avocet	*Recurvirostra americana*	water	migrant	1
Cinnamon/Blue-winged Teal	*Anas discors/clypeata*	water	migrant	1
Western Grebe	*Aechmophorus occidentalis*	water	migrant	9
Brown Pelican	*Pelecanus occidentalis*	water	migrant	2
Double-crested Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax auritus*	water	migrant	2
Black-crowned Night-Heron	*Nycticorax nycticorax*	water	migrant	1
Yuma Clapper Rail	*Rallus longirostris*	water	resident	1
American Coot	*Fulica americana*	water	migrant	5
Mourning Dove	*Zenaida macroura*	terr	resident	3
White-winged Dove	*Zenaida asiatica*	terr	resident	1
Lesser Nighthawk	*Chordeiles acutipennis*	air	resident	2
Common Poorwill	*Phalaenoptilus nuttallii*	air	resident	1
Costa's Hummingbird	*Calypte costae*	air	resident	1
Ash-throated Flycatcher	*Myiarchus cinerascens*	air	resident	1
Black-throated/Sage Sparrow	*Amphispiza sp.*	terr	resident	1
Black Phoebe	*Sayornis nigricollis*	air	resident	1
Loggerhead Shrike	*Lanius ludovicianus*	terr	resident	2
Common Raven	*Corvus corax*	terr	resident	1
Horned Lark	*Eremophila alpestris*	terr	migrant	1
Tree Swallow	*Tachycineta bicolor*	air	migrant	1
Townsend's Warbler	*Setophaga townsendi*	terr	migrant	2
Common Yellowthroat	*Geothlypis trichas*	terr	migrant	1
Savannah Sparrow	*Passerculus sandwichensis*	terr	migrant	1
Yellow-headed Blackbird	*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*	terr	migrant	1
Wilson's Warbler	*Cardellina pusilla*	terr	migrant	2
Western Tanager	*Piranga ludoviciana*	terr	migrant	2
Black-headed Grosbeak	*Pheucticus melanocephalus*	terr	migrant	1
Great-tailed Grackle	*Quiscalus mexicanus*	terr	resident	2
Brown-headed Cowbird	*Molothrus ater*	terr	resident	1

Table 3. Species identified from avian remains at the Genesis trough system solar facility. Total identified birds = 30.

GENESIS		Zone	Residency	MNI
Eared Grebe	*Podiceps nigricollis*	water	migrant	2
Great Blue Heron	*Ardea herodias*	water	migrant	1
American Kestrel	*Falco sparverius*	air	resident	1
Ring-billed Gull	*Larus delawarensis*	water	migrant	2
California Gull	*Larus californianus*	water	resident	1
White-winged Dove	*Zenaida asiatica*	terr	resident	1
Lesser Nighthawk	*Chordeiles acutipennis*	air	resident	2
Say's Phoebe	*Sayornis saya*	air	resident	2
Tree Swallow	*Tachycineta bicolor*	air	migrant	2
Cliff Swallow	*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*	air	resident	5
Hermit Warbler	*Setophaga occidentalis*	terr	migrant	1
Black-headed Grosbeak	*Pheucticus melanocephalus*	terr	migrant	1
Chipping Sparrow	*Spizella passerina*	terr	resident	1
Bullock's Oriole	*Icterus bullockii*	terr	resident	2
Brown-headed Cowbird	*Molothrus ater*	terr	resident	6

Table 4. Species identified from avian remains at the Ivanpah power tower solar facility. Total identified birds = 127

IVANPAH		Zone	Residency	MNI
Cinnamon Teal	*Anas cyanoptera*	water	migrant	4
Cooper's Hawk	*Accipiter cooperii*	air	migrant	1
Red-shouldered Hawk	*Buteo lineatus*	terr	migrant	1
American Kestrel	*Falco sparverius*	air	resident	1
Peregrine Falcon	*Falco peregrinus*	air	resident	1
American Coot	*Fulica americana*	water	migrant	7
Sora	*Porzana carolina*	water	migrant	1
Spotted Sandpiper	*Actitis maculatus*	water	migrant	2
Greater Roadrunner	*Geococcyx californianus*	terr	resident	5
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	*Coccyzus americanus*	terr	migrant	1
Mourning Dove	*Zenaida macroura*	terr	resident	11
Barn Owl	*Tyto alba*	terr	resident	1
Lesser Nighthawk	*Chordeiles acutipennis*	air	resident	3
Common Poorwill	*Phalaenoptilus nuttallii*	air	resident	1
White-throated Swift	*Aeronautes saxatalis*	air	resident	1
Allen's/Rufous Hummingbird	*Selasphorus sp.*	air	migrant	1
Northern Flicker	*Colaptes auratus*	terr	resident	1
Ash-throated Flycatcher	*Myiarchus cinerascens*	air	resident	1
Loggerhead Shrike	*Lanius ludovicianus*	terr	resident	3
Warbling Vireo	*Vireo gilvus*	terr	migrant	1
Common Raven	*Corvus corax*	terr	resident	2
Northern Rough-winged Swallow	*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*	air	migrant	2
Tree Swallow	*Tachycineta bicolor*	air	migrant	2
Verdin	*Auriparus flaviceps*	terr	resident	3
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	*Polioptila caerulea*	terr	resident	1
Northern Mockingbird	*Mimus polyglottos*	terr	resident	1
American Pipit	*Anthus rubescens*	terr	migrant	4
Orange-crowned Warbler	*Oreothlypis celata*	terr	migrant	1
Lucy's Warbler	*Oreothlypis luciae*	terr	resident	1
Black-throated Gray Warbler	*Setophaga nigrescens*	terr	migrant	1
Yellow-rumped Warbler	*Setophaga coronata*	air	migrant	14
Townsend's Warbler	*Setophaga townsendi*	terr	migrant	2
Yellow Warbler	*Setophaga petechia*	terr	migrant	1
Black-and-white Warbler	*Mniotilta varia*	terr	migrant	1
Wilson's Warbler	*Cardellina pusilla*	terr	migrant	2
MacGillivray's Warbler	*Oporornis tolmei*	terr	migrant	1
Western Tanager	*Piranga ludoviciana*	terr	migrant	2
Lazuli Bunting	*Passerina amoena*	terr	migrant	1
Blue Grosbeak	*Passerina caerulea*	terr	resident	1
Green-tailed Towhee	*Pipilo chlorurus*	terr	migrant	1
Brewer's Sparrow	*Spizella breweri*	terr	resident	3
Chipping Sparrow	*Spizella passerina*	terr	resident	3
Black-throated Sparrow	*Amphispiza bilineata*	terr	resident	3
Savannah Sparrow	*Passerculus sandwichensis*	terr	migrant	2
White-crowned Sparrow	*Zonotrichia leucophrys*	terr	migrant	6

IVANPAH		Zone	Residency	MNI
Pine Siskin	*Spinus pinus*	terr	migrant	1
House Finch	*Carpodacus mexicanus*	terr	resident	13
Brown-headed Cowbird	*Molothrus ater*	terr	resident	1
Great-tailed Grackle	*Quiscalus mexicanus*	terr	resident	3

Cause of Death of Birds Found at the Solar Power Plants

Photovoltaic facility (Desert Sunlight):

Sixty-one birds from 33 separate species were represented from Desert Sunlight. Due to desiccation and scavenging, a definitive cause of death could not be established for 22 of the 61 birds (see Table 5). Feathers could be examined in all cases, however, and none of the 61 bird remains submitted from the PV facility had visible evidence of feather singeing, a clear contrast with birds found at Ivanpah.

Blunt force impact trauma was determined to have been the cause of death for 19 Desert Sunlight birds including two Western Grebes (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) and one each of 16 other species. Impact (blunt force) trauma is diagnosed by the presence of fractures and internal and/or external contusions. In particular, bruising around the legs, wings and chest are consistent with crash-landings while fractures of the head and/or neck are consistent with high-velocity, frontal impact (such as may result from impacting a mirror).

Predation was the immediate cause of death for 15 birds. Lesions supporting the finding of predation included decapitation or missing parts of the body with associated hemorrhage (9/15), and lacerations of the skin and pectoral muscles. Eight of the predated birds from Desert Sunlight were

Figure 2: Predation trauma (top) resulting in traumatic amputation of the head and neck (American Avocet) and impact trauma (bottom) causing bruising of the keel ridge of the sternum (Brown Pelican).

grebes, which are unable to easily take off from land. This suggests a link between predation and stranding and/or impact resulting from confusion of the solar panels with water (see Discussion).

Parabolic trough facility (Genesis):

Thirty-one birds were collected from this site. There were 15 species represented. Those found in the greatest numbers were Brown-headed Cowbirds and Cliff Swallows, though no more than 6 individuals from any given species were recovered. Overall, carcass quality was poor and precluded definitive cause of death determination in 17/31 birds (Table 5). Identifiable causes of death consisted of impact trauma (6/31) and predation trauma (2/31). Necropsy findings were similar to those at Desert Sunlight with fractures and hemorrhage noted grossly. Predation trauma was diagnosed in two birds, a Cliff Swallow and a Ring-billed Gull.

Power tower facility (Ivanpah):

Ivanpah is the only facility in this study that produces solar flux, which is intense radiant energy focused by the mirror array on the power-generating tower. Objects that pass through this flux, including insects and birds, encounter extreme heat, although the extent of heating depends on many variables, including the duration of exposure and the precise location in the flux beam.

From Ivanpah, 141 birds were collected and examined. Collection dates spanned a period of one year and five months (July 2012 to December 2013) and included at least seven months of construction during which time the towers were not actively fluxing (2013). There were 49 species represented (Table 4). Those found in the greatest numbers were Yellow-rumped Warblers (*Setophaga coronata;* 14), House Finches (*Carpodacus mexicanus*; 13), Mourning Doves (*Zenaida macroura*; 11) and American Coots (*Fulica americana*; 7). Yellow-rumped Warblers and House Finches were found exclusively at the power tower site.

Solar flux injury was identified as the cause of death in 47/141 birds. Solar flux burns manifested as feather curling, charring, melting and/or breakage and loss. Flight feathers of the tail and/or wings were invariably affected. Burns also tended to occur in one or more of the following areas; the sides of the body (axillae to pelvis), the dorsal coverts, the tops and/sides of the head and neck and the dorsal body wall (the back). Overlapping portions of feathers and light-colored feathers were often spared (Figures 3 and 4).

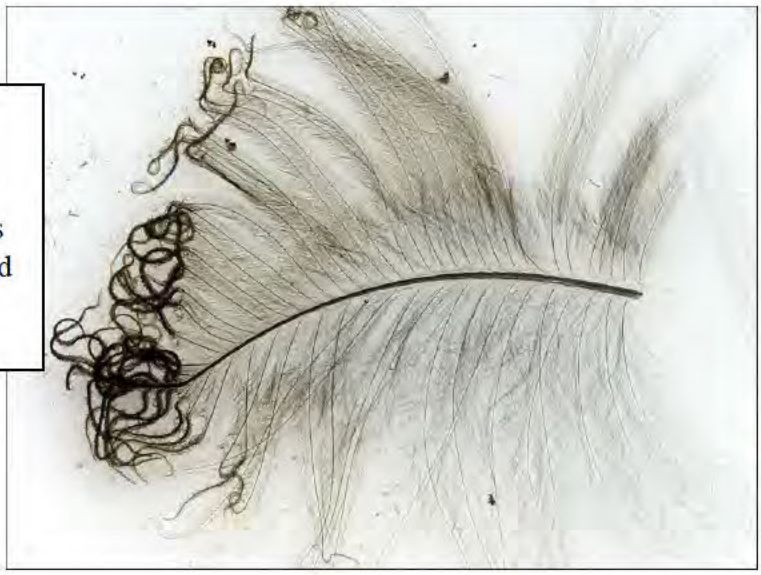


Figure 3: contour feather from the back of a House Finch with Grade 3 solar flux injury. The feather has curling and charring limited to the exposed tip.

Figure 4: Feather from a Peregrine Falcon with Grade 2 solar flux injury. Note burning of dark feather bands with relative sparing of light bands.

The yellow and red rumps of Yellow-rumped Warblers and House Finches respectively remained strikingly unaffected (See Figure 1). Charring of head feathers, in contrast, was generally diffuse across all color patterns. A pattern of spiraling bands of curled feathers across or around the body and wings was often apparent.

Table 5. Cause of death (COD) data

Cause of Death	Ivanpah	Genesis	Desert Sunlight	Total
Solar Flux	47	0	0	47
Impact trauma	24	6	19	49
Predation trauma	5	2	15	22
Trauma of undetermined cause	14	0	0	14
Electrocution	1	0	0	1
Emaciation	1	0	0	1
Undetermined (remains in poor condition)	46	17	22	85
No evident cause of death	3	6	5	14
Total	141	31	61	233

Eight birds were assigned a feather damage Grade of 1 with curling of less than 50% of the flight feathers. Six of these had other evidence of acute trauma (75%). Five birds were Grade 2, including three birds that were found alive and died shortly afterwards. Of these birds, 2 (the birds found dead) also had evidence of acute trauma. Twenty-eight birds were Grade 3; with charring of body feathers. Of these birds, 21/28

(28%) had other evidence of acute trauma. Remaining carcasses (6) were incomplete and a grade could not be assigned.

Twenty-nine birds with solar flux burns also had evidence of impact trauma. Trauma consisted of skull fractures or indentations (8), sternum fractures (4), one or more rib fractures (4), vertebral fractures (1), leg fracture (3), wing fracture (1) and/or mandible fracture (1). Other signs of trauma included acute macroscopic and/or microscopic internal hemorrhage. Location found was reported for 39 of these birds; most of the intact carcasses were found near or in a tower. One was found in the inner heliostat ring and one was found (alive) on a road between tower sites. The date of carcass collection was provided for 42/47. None were found prior to the reported first flux (2013).

Figure 5: The dorsal aspect of the wing from a Peregrine Falcon (the same bird as shown in Figure 4) with Grade 2 lesions. Note extensive curling of feathers without visible charring. This bird was found alive, unable to fly, emaciated and died shortly thereafter. These findings demonstrate fatal loss of function due to solar flux exposure in the absence of skin or other soft tissue burns.

Among the solar flux cases, a variety of bird species were affected though all but one (a raptor) was a passerine (Appendix 2). House Finches and yellow-rumped Warblers were most often represented (10/47 and 12/47 respectively). For the birds in which species could be determined (41/47), insects were a major

dietary component in all but two species. These were an unidentified hummingbird (*Selasphorus*) species (known to include insects in the diet) and a Peregrine Falcon (a species that feeds on small birds).

Four birds were reportedly found alive and taken to a wildlife rehabilitation center where they died one to a few days later (exact dates were not consistently provided). Three had Grade 2 feather burns and one had Grade 3 feather burns. None had other evidence of trauma. Body condition was reduced in all of the birds (two considered thin and two emaciated) based on a paucity of fat stores and depletion of skeletal muscling. The four birds were of four different species and consisted of three passerines and one raptor.

The second most commonly diagnosed cause of death at the Ivanpah facility was impact (or blunt force) trauma (24/141 birds). Necropsy findings were as previously described at the Desert Sunlight facility. Impact marks were reported on heliostat mirrors adjacent to the carcasses in 5 cases and mirrors were described as being vertically-oriented in 5 cases. Specific carcass locations were reported for 18 of the birds. Those birds were found in a variety of areas; below heliostats (8/18), in or near tower and powerblock buildings (4/18), on roads (2/18), below power lines (2/18), in the open (1/18) and by a desert tortoise pen (1/18).

Predation was determined to be the cause of death for five of the birds. A coot and a Mourning Dove were found with extensive trauma and hemorrhage to the head and upper body consisting of lacerations, crush trauma and/or decapitation. One of the birds (an American Coot) was found near a kit fox shelter site. One bird (Northern Mockingbird) was found near the fence line and the third (a Mourning Dove) in an alley way. Two more birds (an unidentified sparrow and an American Pipit) were observed being eaten by one of the resident Common Ravens.

Discussion of Cause of Death of Birds Found at the Solar Power Plants

Impact trauma:

Sheet glass used in commercial and residential buildings has been well-established as a hazard for birds, especially passerines (Klem 1990, 2004, 2006; Loss et al. 2014). A recent comprehensive review estimated that between 365-988 million birds die annually by impacting glass panels in the United States alone (median estimate 599 million; Loss et al. 2014). Conditions that precipitate window strike events include the positioning of vegetation on either side of the glass and the reflective properties of the window. Glass panels that reflect trees and other attractive habitat are involved in a higher number of bird collisions.

The mirrors and photovoltaic panels used at all three facilities are movable and generally directed upwardly, reflecting the sky. At the Ivanpah facility, when heliostats are oriented vertically (typically for washing or installation, personal communication, RAK) they appear to pose a greater risk for birds. Of the eight birds reported found under a heliostat, heliostats were vertically-oriented in at least 5 cases. (D Klem Jr., DC Keck, KL Marty, AJ Miller Ball, EE Niciu, and CT Platt. 2004. Effects of window angling, feeder placement, and scavengers on avian mortality at plate glass. Wilson Bulletin, 116(1):69-73; D Klem Jr. 2006. Glass: A deadly conservation issue for birds. Bird Observer 34(2):73-81; D Klem Jr. 1990.

Collisions between birds and windows: mortality and prevention. Journal of Field Ornithology 61:120–128; Loss, S.R., T. Will, S.S.Loss, and P.P. Marra. 2014. Bird-building collisions in the United States: Estimates of annual mortality and species vulnerability. Condor 116: 8-23). Studies with aquatic insects have found that vertically-oriented black glass surfaces (similar to solar panels) produced highly polarized reflected light, making them highly attractive (Kriska, G., P. Makik, I. Szivak, and G. Horvath. 2008. Glass buildings on river banks as "polarized light traps" for mass-swarming polarotactic caddis flies. Naturwissenschaften 95: 461-467).

A desert environment punctuated by a large expanse of reflective, blue panels may be reminiscent of a large body of water. Birds for which the primary habitat is water, including coots, grebes, and cormorants, were over-represented in mortalities at the Desert Sunlight facility (44%) compared to Genesis (19%) and Ivanpah (10%). Several factors may inform these observations. First, the size and continuity of the panels differs between facilities. Mirrors at Ivanpah are individual, 4 x 8' panels that appear from above as stippling in a desert background (Figure 6). Photovoltaic panels at Desert Sunlight are long banks of adjacent 27.72 x 47.25" panels (70 x 120 cm), providing a more continuous, sky/water appearance. Similarly, troughs at Genesis are banks of 5 x 5.5' panels that are up to 49-65 meters long.

Figure 6: The Ivanpah Solar Electric Generating System as seen via satellite. The mirrored panels are 5 x 8 feet.

There is growing concern about "polarized light pollution" as a source of mortality for wildlife, with evidence that photovoltaic panels may be particularly effective sources of polarized light in the environment (see Horvath et al. 2010. Reducing the maladaptive attractiveness of solar panels to polarotactic insects. Conservation Biology 24: 1644-1653, and ParkScience, Vol. 27, Number 1, 2010; available online at: http://www.nature.nps.gov/parkscience/index.cfm?ArticleID=386&ArticleTypeID=5; as well as discussion of this issue in the Desert Sunlight Final Environmental Impact Statement, Chapter 4, pp. 14-15).

Variables that may affect the illusory characteristics of solar panels are structural elements or markings that may break up the reflection. Visual markers spaced at a distance of 28 cm or less have been shown to reduce the number of window strike events on large commercial buildings (City of Toronto Green Development Standard; Bird-friendly development guidelines. March 2007). Mirrors at the Ivanpah facility are unobscured by structures or markings and present a diffuse, reflective surface. Photovoltaic panels at Desert Sunlight are arranged as large banks of small units that are 60 x 90 cm. The visually uninterrupted expanse of both these types of heliostat is larger than that which provides a solid structure visual cue to passerines. Parabolic troughs at Genesis have large, diffusely reflective surfaces between seams that periodically transect the bank of panels at 5.5' intervals. Structures within the near field, including the linear concentrator and support arms, and their reflection in the panels and may provide a visual cue to differentiate the panel as a solid structure.

The paper by Horvath et al cited above provides experimental evidence that placing a white outline and/or white grid lines on solar panels significantly reduced the attractiveness of these panels to aquatic insects, with a loss of only 1.8% in energy-producing surface area (p. 1651). While similar detailed studies have yet to be carried out with birds, this work, combined with the window strike results, suggest that significant reductions in avian mortality at solar facilities could be achieved by relatively minor modifications of panel and mirror design. This should be a priority for further research.

Finally, ponds are present on the property of the Desert Sunlight and Genesis facilities. The pond at Genesis is netted, reducing access by migratory birds, while the pond at Desert Sunlight is open to flighted wildlife. Thus, birds are both attracted to the water feature at Desert Sunlight and habituated to the presence of an accessible aquatic environment in the area. This may translate into the misinterpretation of a diffusely reflected sky or horizonal polarized light source as a body of water.

Stranding and Predation:

Predation is likely linked to panel-related impact trauma and stranding. Water birds were heavily over-represented in predation mortalities at Desert Sunlight. Of the 15 birds that died due to predation, 14 make their primary habitat on water (coots, grebes, a cormorant, and an avocet). A single White-winged Dove was the only terrestrial-based predation mortality in the submitted specimens. This is in contrast to blunt trauma mortalities at Desert Sunlight in which 8 of the 19 birds determined to have died of impact trauma were water species.

Locations of the birds when found dead were noted on several submissions. Of the birds that died of predation for which locations were known, none were located near ponds. The physiology of several of

these water birds is such that locomotion on land is difficult or impossible. Grebes in particular have very limited mobility on land and require a run across water in order to take off (Jehl, J. R., 1996. Mass mortality events of Eared Grebes in North America. Journal of Field Ornithology 67: 471-476). Thus, these birds likely did not reach their final location intentionally. Ponds at the PV and trough sites are fenced, prohibiting terrestrial access by predators. Birds on the water or banks of the pond are inaccessible to resident predators. Therefore, it is unlikely that the birds were captured at the pond and transported by a predator into the area of the panels. Attempts to land or feed on the panels because of their deceptive appearance may have injured the birds to the point that they could not escape to safety, or inadvertently stranded the birds on a substrate from which they could not take flight. We believe that an inability to quickly flee after striking the panels and stranding on the ground left these birds vulnerable to opportunistic predators. At least two types of predators, kit foxes and ravens, have been observed in residence at the power tower and PV facilities and ravens have been reported at the trough site (personal communication and observation, RAK). Additionally, histories for multiple birds found at the tower site document carcasses found near kit fox shelters or being eaten or carried by a raven.

Solar Flux:

Avian mortality due to exposure to solar flux has been previously explored and documented (McCrary, M. D., McKernan, R. L., Schreiber, R. W., Wagner, W. D., and Sciarrotta, T. C. Avian mortality at a solar energy power plant. Journal of Field Ornithology, 57(2): 135-141). Solar flux injury to the birds of this report, as expected, occurred only at the power tower facility. Flux injury grossly differed from other sources of heat injury, such as electrocution or fire. Electrocution injury requires the bridging of two contact points and is, therefore, seen almost exclusively in larger birds such as raptors. Contact points tend to be on the feet, carpi and/or head and burns are often found in these areas. Electrocution causes deep tissue damage as opposed to the surface damage of fire or solar flux. Other sequelae include amputation of limbs with burn marks on bone, blood vessel tears and pericardial hemorrhage. Burns from fires cause widespread charring and melting of feathers and soft tissues and histopathologic findings of soot inhalation or heat damage to the respiratory mucosa. None of these were characteristics of flux injury. In the flux cases small birds were over-represented, had burns generally limited to the feathers and internal injuries attributable to impact. Flux injury inconsistently resulted in charring, tended to affect feathers along the dorsal aspects of the wings and tail, and formed band-like patterns across the body (Divincenti, F. C., J. A. Moncrief, and B. A. Pruitt. 1969. Electrical injuries: a review of 65 cases. The Journal of Trauma 9: 497-507).

Proposed mechanisms of solar flux-related death follow one or a combination of the following pathways:

- impact trauma following direct heat damage to feathers and subsequent loss of flight ability
- starvation and/or thermoregulatory dysfunction following direct heat damage to feathers
- shock
- soft tissue damage following whole-body exposure to high heat
- ocular damage following exposure to bright light.

Necropsy findings from this study are most supportive of the first three mechanisms.

Loss of feather integrity has effects on a bird's ability to take off, land, sustain flight and maneuver. Tail feathers are needed for lift production and maneuverability, remiges are needed for thrust and lift and feathers along the propatagium and coverts confer smoothness to the avian airfoil. Shortening of primary flight feathers by as little as 1.6 cm with loss of secondary and tertiary remiges has been shown to eliminate take-off ability in house sparrows further demonstrating the importance of these feathers (Brown, R. E., and A. C. Cogley, 1996. Contributions of the propatagium to avian flight: Journal of Experimental Zoology 276: 112-124). Loss of relatively few flight feathers can, therefore, render a bird unable or poorly-able to fly. Birds encountering the flux field at Ivanpah may fall as far as 400 feet after feather singeing. Signs of impact trauma were often observed in birds with feather burns and are supportive of sudden loss of function (Beaufrere, H., 2009. A review of biomechanic and aerodynamic considerations of the avian thoracic limb. Journal of Avian Medicine and Surgery 23: 173-185).

Birds appear to be able to survive flux burns in the short term, as evidenced by the collection of several live birds with singed feathers. Additionally, Forensic Lab staff observed a falcon or falcon-like bird with a plume of smoke arising from the tail as it passed through the flux field. Immediately after encountering the flux, the bird exhibited a controlled loss of stability and altitude but was able to cross the perimeter fence before landing. The bird could not be further located following a brief search (personal observation, RAK and EOE). Birds that initially survive the flux exposure and are able to glide to the ground or a perch may be disabled to the point that they cannot efficiently acquire food, escape predators or thermoregulate. Observations of emaciation in association with feather burns in birds found alive is supportive of debilitation subsequent to flux exposure. More observational studies and follow-up are required to understand how many birds survive flux exposure and whether survival is always merely short-term. As demonstrated by the falcon, injured birds (particulary larger birds), may be ambulatory enough to glide or walk over the property line indicating a need to include adjacent land in carcass searches.

There was evidence of acute skin burns on the heads of some of the Grade 3 birds that were found dead. But interestingly, tissue burn effects could not be demonstrated in birds known to have survived short periods after being burned. Hyperthermia causing instantaneous death manifests as rapid burning of tissue, but when death occurs a day or later there will be signs of tissue loss, inflammation, proteinic exudate and/or cellular death leading to multisystemic organ failure. The beginnings of an inflammatory response to injury can be microscopically observed within one to a few hours after the insult and would have been expected in any of the four birds found alive. Signs of heat stroke or inhalation of hot air should have been observable a day or more after the incident. Rather, in these cases extensive feather burns on the body largely appeared to be limited to the tips of the feathers with the overlapping portions insulating the body as designed. This, in conjunction with what is likely only a few seconds or less spent in the flux, suggests that skin or internal organ damage from exposure to high temperatures in solar flux may not be a major cause of the observed mortality.

Ocular damage following light exposure was also considered but could not be demonstrated in the submitted birds. In the four birds that initially survived, there were no signs of retinal damage, inflammation or other ocular trauma. Given the small sample size, this does not preclude sight impairment as a possible sequela but clinical monitoring of survivors would be needed to draw more definitive conclusions.

Other/Undetermined:

Powerline electrocution was the cause of death for one bird (a juvenile Common Raven) at the Ivanpah facility. Electrocution at these solar facilities is a potential hazard but, thus far, appears to be an uncommon cause of death.

Smashed birds (13/233) were found at all three locations. Detailed carcass collection information was provided for 6; all were found on roads. Though poor carcass quality in all cases precluded definitive cause death determination, circumstances and carcass condition suggest vehicle trauma as the cause of deaths. The relatively low numbers of vehicle collisions may be attributed to slow on-site vehicle speeds and light traffic. Vehicle collisions, therefore, do not appear to be a major source of mortality and would be expected to decrease as construction ends.

There was a large number of birds (85/233) for which a cause of death could not be determined due to poor carcass condition. The arid, hot environment at these facilities leads to rapid carcass degradation which greatly hinders pathology examination. Results were especially poor for birds from the Genesis facility, where the cause of death(s) for 23/31 (74%) could not be determined. These results underscore the need for carcasses to be collected soon after death. More frequent, concerted carcass sweeps are advised.

Insect mortality and solar facilities as "mega-traps"

An ecological trap is a situation that results in an animal selecting a habitat that reduces its fitness relative to other available habitats (Robertson, B.A. and R.L. Hutto. 2006. A framework for understanding ecological traps and an evaluation of existing evidence. Ecology 87: 1075-1085; Robertson, B.A., J.S. Rehage, and Sih, A. 2013. Ecological novelty and the emergence of evolutionary traps. Trends in Ecology and Evolution 28: 552-560).

A wide variety of circumstances may create ecological traps, ranging from subtle (songbirds attracted to food resources in city parks, where they are vulnerable to unnaturally high populations of predators) to direct (birds are attracted to oil-filled ponds, believing it to be water, and become trapped). It appears that solar flux facilities may act as "**mega-traps,**" which we define as artificial features that attract and kill species of multiple trophic layers. The strong light emitted by these facilities attract insects, which in turn attract insect-eating birds, which are incapacitated by solar flux injury, thus attracting predators and creating an entire food chain vulnerable to injury and death.

OLE staff observed large numbers of insect carcasses throughout the Ivanpah site during their visit. In some places there were hundreds upon hundreds of butterflies (including monarchs, *Danaus plexippus*) and dragonfly carcasses. Some showed singeing, and many appeared to have just fallen from the sky. Careful observation with binoculars showed the insects were active in the bright area around the boiler at the top of the tower. It was deduced that the solar flux creates such a bright light that it is brighter than the surrounding daylight. Insects were attracted to the light and could be seen actively flying the height of the tower. Birds were also observed feeding on the insects. At times birds flew into the solar flux and ignited. Bird carcasses recovered from the site showed the typical singed feathers. The large populations of insects

may also attract indigenous bat species, which were seen roosting in structures at the base of the power tower.

Monarch butterflies in North America – both east and west of the Rocky Mountains – have been documented to be in decline (see the North American Monarch Conservation Plan, available at: http://www.mlmp.org/Resources/pdf/5431_Monarch_en.pdf). Proposed causes include general habitat loss and specific loss of milkweed, upon which the butterflies feed and reproduce. Considering the numerous monarch butterfly carcasses seen at the Ivanpah facility, it appears that solar power towers could have a significant impact on monarch populations in the desert southwest. Analysis of the insect mortality at Ivanpah, and systematic observations of bird/insect interactions around the power tower, is clearly needed.

Bird species affected by solar flux include both insectivores (e.g. swallows, swifts, flycatchers, and warblers) and raptors that prey on insect-feeding birds. Based on observations of the tower in flux and the finding of large numbers of butterflies, dragonflies and other insects at the base of the tower and in adjacent buildings it is suspected that the bright light generated by solar flux attracts insects, which in turn attracts insectivores and predators of insectivores. Waterbirds and other birds that feed on vegetation were not found to have solar flux burns. Birds were observed perching and feeding on railings at the top of the tower, apparently in response to the insect aggregations there.

Further, dead bats found at the Ivanpah site could be attracted to the large numbers of insects in the area. Nineteen bats from the condenser area of the power tower facility have been submitted to NFWFL for further evaluation. These bats belong to the Vespertilionidae and Molossidae families, which contain species considered by the Bureau of Land Management to be sensitive species in California. Preliminary evaluation revealed no apparent singing of the hair, and analysis is ongoing.

Solar flux and heat associated with solar power tower facilities

Despite repeated requests, we have been unsuccessful in obtaining technical data relating to the temperature associated with solar flux at the Ivanpah facility. The following summarizes the information we have gathered from other sources.

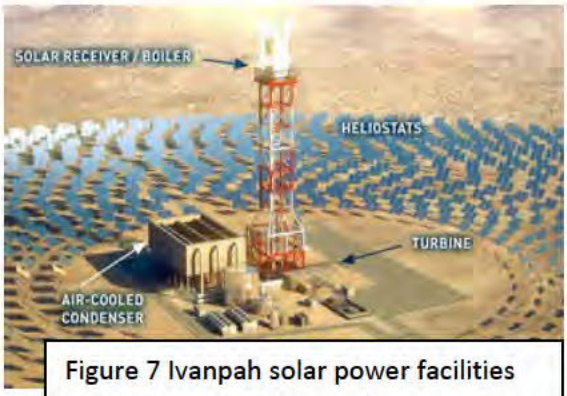


Figure 7 Ivanpah solar power facilities http://ivanpahsolar.com/about

The Ivanpah solar energy generating facility consists of mirrors that reflect sunlight to a tower. In the tower sits a boiler that generates steam which then powers a turbine.

At the top of a 459 foot tall tower sits a boiler (solar receiver) that is heated by the sun rays reflected by 300,000 mirrors, called solar heliostats. When the concentrated sunlight strikes the boiler tubes, it heats the water to create superheated steam. The high temperature steam is then piped from the boiler to a turbine where electricity is generated (http://ivanpahsolar.com/about visited on 01/20/2014).

If all the solar heliostats are focused on the solar tower the beams multiply the strength of sunlight by 5000 times, and this generates temperatures at the solar tower in excess of 3600° Fahrenheit (> 1982° Celsius). Since steel melts at 2750° Fahrenheit (1510° Celsius), only a percentage of heliostats are focused on the solar receiver so that) the optimal temperature at the tower is approximately 900° Fahrenheit (~482° Celsius) ("How do they do it" Wag TV for Discovery Channel, Season 3, Episode 15, "Design Airplane Parachutes, Create Solar Power, Make Sunglasses" Aired August 25, 2009).

Figure 8: Seville solar power facility (http://inhabitat.com/sevilles-solar-power-tower)

A solar steam plant in Coalinga that also uses heliostat technology for extracting oil is on record stating that the steam generator is set to about 500° Celsius. (http://abclocal.go.com/kDSn/story?section=news%2Fbusiness&id=8377469 Viewed Jan 21, 2013)

Temperatures measured by the authors at the edge of the solar complex on the surface of a heliostat were approximately 200° Fahrenheit (~93° Celsius). Therefore, there is a gradient of temperature from the edge of the solar field to the tower that ranges from 200° to 900° Fahrenheit.

There is a phenomenon that occurs when the heliostats are focused on the tower and electricity is being generated. The phenomenon can be described as either a circle of clouds around the tower or, at times, a cloud formed on the side that is receiving the solar reflection. It appears as though the tower is creating clouds. Currently we propose two hypotheses of why this "cloud" is formed. The first hypothesis is simply the presumption that the high heat associated with towers is condensing the air, and forming the

Figure 9: Tower 1 (bright white) is shown under power. Tower 2 (black) is not operating.

clouds. The second hypothesis is that this phenomenon does not represent clouds at all rather it is a place in space where the heliostats that are not being used to generate heat are focused. Under this scenario, it is a place where the mirrors focus the excess energy not being used to generate electricity.

Ivanpah employees and OLE staff noticed that close to the periphery of the tower and within the reflected solar field area, streams of smoke rise when an object crosses the solar flux fields aimed at the tower. Ivanpah employees used the term "streamers" to characterize this occurrence.

When OLE staff visited the Ivanpah Solar plant, we observed many streamer events. It is claimed that these events represent the combustion of loose debris, or insects. Although some of the events are likely that, there were instances in which the amount of smoke produced by the ignition could only be explained by a larger flammable biomass such as a bird. Indeed OLE staff observed birds entering the solar flux and igniting, consequently becoming a streamer.

OLE staff observed an average of one streamer event every two minutes. It appeared that the streamer events occurred more frequently within the "cloud" area adjacent to the tower. Therefore we hypothesize that the "cloud" has a very high temperature that is igniting all material that traverses its field.
One possible explanation of this this phenomenon is that the "cloud" is a convergent location where heliostats are "parked" when not in use. Conversely it undermines the condensation hypothesis, given that birds flying through condensation clouds will not spontaneously ignite.

Temperatures required to burn feathers

Many of the carcasses recovered from the Ivanpah Solar plant after the plant became operational showed singing of feathers as shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Singed feathers from a Northern Rough-winged Swallow

In order to investigate at what temperature feathers burn/singe, we exposed feathers to different air temperatures. Each feather was exposed to a stream of helium and air for 30 seconds. The results indicate that at 400° Celsius (752° Fahrenheit) after 30 seconds the feather begins to degrade. But at 450° and

Figure 11: Results of exposing feathers to different temperatures (in degrees Celsius)

500° Celsius (842° and 932° Fahrenheit respectively) the feathers singed as soon as they made contact with the superheated air (Figure 11). Therefore, when singed birds are found, it can be inferred that the temperatures in the solar flux at the time a bird flew through it was at least 400° Celsius (752° Fahrenheit). This inference is consistent with the desired operating temperature of a power tower solar boiler (482° Celsius).

The fact that a bird will catch on fire as it flies through the solar flux has been confirmed by a Chevron engineer who works at the Coalinga Chevron Steam plant, a joint venture of Chevron and BrightSource Solar. (http://abclocal.go.com/kDSn/story?section=news%2Fbusiness&id=8377469 Viewed Jan 21, 2013)

Conclusions and Recommendations

In summary, three main causes of avian mortality were identified at these facilities; impact trauma, predation and solar flux. Birds at all three types of solar plants were susceptible to impact trauma and predators. Solar flux injury was unique to the power tower facility. Solar facilities, in general, do not appear to attract particular species, rather an ecological variety of birds are vulnerable. That said, certain mortality and species trends were evident, such as waterbirds at Desert Sunlight, where open water sources were present.

Specific hazards were identified, including vertically-oriented mirrors or other smooth reflective panels; water-like reflective or polarizing panels; actively fluxing towers; open bodies of water; aggregations of insects that attracted insectivorous birds; and resident predators. Making towers, ponds and panels less attractive or accessible to birds may mitigate deaths. Specific actions include placing perch-guards on power tower railings near the flux field, properly netting or otherwise covering ponds, tilting heliostat mirrors during washing and suspending power tower operation at peak migration times.

Visual cues should be retrofitted to existing panels and incorporated into new panel design. These cues may include UV-reflective or solid, contrasting bands spaced no further than 28 cm from each other. This arrangement has been shown to significantly reduce the number of passerines hitting expanses of windows on commercial buildings. Spacing of 10 cm eliminates window strikes altogether. Further exploration of panel design and orientation should be undertaken with researchers experienced in the field (Daneil Klem Jr. of Muhlenberg College) to determine causes for the high rate of impact trauma, and designs optimized to reduce these mortalities.

Challenges to data collection included rapid degradation of carcass quality hindering cause of death and species determination; large facilities which are difficult to efficiently search for carcasses; vegetation and panels obscuring ground visibility; carcass loss due to scavenging; and inconsistent documentation of carcass history. Searcher efficiency has been shown to have varying influences on carcass recovery with anywhere from 30% to 90% detection of small birds achieved in studies done at wind plants (Erickson et al., 2005). Scavengers may also remove substantial numbers of carcasses. In studies done on agricultural fields, up to 90% of small bird carcasses were lost within 24 hours (Balcomb, 1986; Wobeser and Wobeser, 1992). OLE staff observed apparently resident ravens at the Ivanpah power tower. Ravens are efficient scavengers, and could remove large numbers of small bird carcasses from the tower vicinity. (Erickson, W. P., G. D. Johnson, and D. P. Young, Jr., 2005, A summary and comparison of bird mortality from anthropogenic causes with an emphasis on collisions: U S Forest Service General Technical Report PSW, v. 191, p. 1029-1042; Balcomb, R., 1986, Songbird carcasses disappear rapidly from agricultural fields: Auk, v. 103, p. 817-820; Wobeser, G., and A. G. Wobeser, 1992, Carcass disappearance and estimation of mortality in a simulated die-off of small birds: Journal of Wildlife Diseases, v. 28, p. 548-554.)

Given these variables it is difficult to know the true scope of avian mortality at these facilities. The numbers of dead birds are likely underrepresented, perhaps vastly so. Observational and statistical studies to account for carcass loss may help us to gain a better sense of how many birds are being killed. Complete histories would help us to identify factors (such as vertical placement of mirrors) leading to mortalities. Continued monitoring is also advised as these facilities transition from construction to full operation. Of especial concern is the Ivanpah facility which was not fully-functioning at the time of the latest carcass submissions. In fact, all but 7 of the carcasses with solar flux injury and reported dates of collection were found at or prior to the USFWS site visit (October 21-24, 2013) and, therefore, represent flux mortality from a facility operating at only 33% capacity. Investigation into bat and insect mortalities at the power tower site should also be pursued.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to acknowledge the invaluable assistance and insights of S.A. Michael Clark and S.A. Ed Nieves.

Appendix 1. List of all 71 species recovered from the three solar energy sites. In this table, remains of closely related taxa that could not be definitively identified (e.g. Cinnamon/Blue-winged Teal and Black-throated/Sage Sparrow) are assigned to the biogeographically more likely taxon. In all such cases, the possible taxa are ecologically similar. All of these species are MBTA-listed.

SPECIES		Zone	Residency	Sites	MNI
Cinnamon Teal	*Anas cyanoptera*	water	migrant	DS,IV	5
Pied-billed Grebe	*Podilymbus podiceps*	water	migrant	DS	1
Western Grebe	*Aechmorphorus occidentalis*	water	migrant	DS	9
Eared Grebe	*Podiceps nigricollis*	water	migrant	DS,GN	5
Brown Pelican	*Pelecanus occidentalis*	water	migrant	DS	2
Double-crested Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax auritus*	water	migrant	DS	2
Great Blue Heron	*Ardea herodias*	water	migrant	GN	1
Black-crowned Night-Heron	*Nycticorax nycticorax*	water	migrant	DS	1
Cooper's Hawk	*Accipiter cooperii*	air	migrant	IV	1
Red-shouldered Hawk	*Buteo lineatus*	terr	migrant	IV	1
American Kestrel	*Falco sparverius*	air	resident	GN,IV	2
Peregrine Falcon	*Falco peregrinus*	air	resident	IV	1
American Coot	*Fulica americana*	water	migrant	DS, IV	12
Yuma Clapper Rail	*Rallus longirostris yumanensis*	water	resident	DS	1
Sora	*Porzana carolina*	water	migrant	DS,IV	2
American Avocet	*Recurvirostra americana*	water	migrant	DS	1
Spotted Sandpiper	*Actitis maculatus*	water	migrant	IV	2
Ring-billed Gull	*Larus delawarensis*	water	migrant	GN	2
California Gull	*Larus californianus*	water	resident	GN	1
Greater Roadrunner	*Geococcyx californianus*	terr	resident	IV	5
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	*Coccyzus americanus*	terr	migrant	IV	1
Mourning Dove	*Zenaida macroura*	terr	resident	DS, IV	14
White-winged Dove	*Zenaida asiatica*	terr	resident	DS,GN	2
Barn Owl	*Tyto alba*	terr	resident	IV	1
Lesser nighthawk	*Chordeiles acutipennis*	air	resident	DS,GN,IV	7
Common Poorwill	*Phalaenoptilus nuttallii*	air	resident	DS,IV	2
White-throated Swift	*Aeronautes saxatalis*	air	resident	IV	1
Costa's Hummingbird	*Calypte costae*	air	resident	DS	1
Allen's/Rufous Hummingbird	*Selasphorus sp.*	air	migrant	IV	1
Northern Flicker	*Colaptes auratus*	terr	resident	IV	1
Ash-throated Flycatcher	*Myiarchus cinerascens*	air	resident	DS,IV	2
Say's Phoebe	*Sayornis saya*	air	resident	GN	2
Black Phoebe	*Sayornis nigricollis*	air	resident	DS	1
Loggerhead shrike	*Lanius ludovicianus*	terr	resident	DS,IV	5
Warbling Vireo	*Vireo gilvus*	terr	migrant	IV	1
Common Raven	*Corvus corax*	terr	resident	DS,IV	3
Horned Lark	*Eremophila alpestris*	terr	migrant	DS	1
Tree Swallow	*Tachycineta bicolor*	air	migrant	DS,GN,IV	5

SPECIES		Zone	Residency	Sites	MNI
Cliff Swallow	*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*	air	resident	GN	5
No. Rough-winged Swallow	*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*	air	migrant	IV	2
Verdin	*Auriparus flaviceps*	terr	resident	IV	3
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	*Polioptila caerulea*	terr	resident	IV	1
Northern Mockingbird	*Mimus polyglottos*	terr	resident	IV	1
American Pipit	*Anthus rubescens*	terr	migrant	IV	4
Orange-crowned Warbler	*Oreothlypis celata*	terr	migrant	IV	1
Lucy's Warbler	*Oreothlypis luciae*	terr	resident	IV	1
Yellow-rumped Warbler	*Setophaga coronata*	air	migrant	IV	14
Black-throated Gray Warbler	*Setophaga nigrescens*	terr	migrant	IV	1
Hermit Warbler	*Setophaga occidentalis*	terr	migrant	GN	1
Townsend's warbler	*Setophaga townsendi*	terr	migrant	DS,IV	4
Yellow Warbler	*Setophaga petechia*	terr	migrant	IV	1
Black-and-white Warbler	*Mniotilta varia*	terr	migrant	IV	1
MacGillivray's Warbler	*Oporornis tolmei*	terr	migrant	IV	1
Wilson's Warbler	*Cardellina pusilla*	terr	migrant	DS,IV	4
Common Yellowthroat	*Geothlypis trichas*	terr	migrant	DS	1
Western Tanager	*Piranga ludoviciana*	terr	migrant	DS,IV	4
Black-headed Grosbeak	*Pheucticus melanocephalus*	terr	migrant	DS,GN	2
Lazuli Bunting	*Passerina caerulea*	terr	migrant	IV	1
Blue Grosbeak	*Passerina caerulea*	terr	resident	IV	1
Green-tailed Towhee	*Pipilo chlorurus*	terr	migrant	IV	1
Brewer's Sparrow	*Spizella breweri*	terr	resident	IV	3
Chipping Sparrow	*Spizella passerina*	terr	resident	GN,IV	4
Black-throated Sparrow	*Amphispiza bilineata*	terr	resident	DS,IV	4
Savannah Sparrow	*Passerculus sandwichensis*	terr	migrant	DS,IV	3
White-crowned Sparrow	*Zonotrichia leucophrys*	terr	migrant	IV	6
Pine Siskin	*Spinus pinus*	terr	migrant	IV	1
House Finch	*Carpodacus mexicanus*	terr	resident	IV	13
Great-tailed Grackle	*Quiscalus mexicanus*	terr	resident	DS,IV	5
Brown-headed Cowbird	*Molothrus ater*	terr	resident	DS,GN,IV	8
Yellow-headed Blackbird	*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*	terr	migrant	DS	1
Bullock's Oriole	*Icterus bullockii*	terr	resident	GN	2

Species recovered from one site: 47
two sites: 18
three sites: 5

Appendix 2. Species with solar flux burns

Common Name	Scientific name	
Yellow-rumped warbler	*Setophaga coronata*	12
House finch	*Carpodacus mexicanus*	10
Chipping sparrow	*Spizella passerina*	2
Unidentified warbler	*Parulidae*	2
Verdin	*Auriparus flaviceps*	2
Great-tailed grackle	*Quiscalus mexicanus*	2
Lucy's warbler	*Oreothlypis luciae*	1
Wilson's warbler	*Cardellina pusilla*	1
MacGillivray's warbler	*Oporornis tolmei*	1
Black-throated gray warbler	*Setophaga nigrescens*	1
Townsend's warbler	*Setophaga townsendi*	1
Orange-crowned warbler	*Oreothlypis celata*	1
Blue-gray gnatcatcher	*Polioptila caerulea*	1
Unidentified swallow	*Hirundinidae*	1
Northern rough-winged swallow	*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*	1
Warbling vireo	*Vireo gilvus*	1
Unidentified hummingbird	*Selasphorus sp.*	1
Unidentified passerine	Passeriformes	1
Unidentified finch	*Carpodacus sp.*	1
Lazuli bunting	*Passerina caerulea*	1
Unidentified sparrow	*Spizella species*	1
Unidentified blackbird	*Icteridae*	1
Peregrine falcon	*Falco peregrinus*	1

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AVIAN MORTALITY AT A SOLAR ENERGY POWER PLANT

By Michael D. McCrary, Robert L. McKernan,
Ralph W. Schreiber, William D. Wagner,
and Terry C. Sciarrotta

In 1979, the United States Department of Energy, in conjunction with the Southern California Edison Company (SCE) and the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, initiated the construction of Solar One, the world's largest solar energy power plant (Fig. 1). Until the construction of Solar One, the use of the sun's energy to produce electrical power had not been attempted on this scale, and the environmental hazards of operation of a solar power plant were unknown. In this paper we report on bird mortality at Solar One.

STUDY AREA AND METHODS

Solar One is a 10 megawatt, central receiver solar power plant consisting of a 32-ha field of 1818, 6.9 × 6.9 m mirrors (heliostats) which concentrate sunlight on a centrally located, tower-mounted boiler, 86 m in height (Fig. 1). The reflective surface area of each heliostat is approximately 40 m^2, and the total for all heliostats is approximately 72,500 m^2. When not directed at the tower during morning startup, testing, and maintenance, some or all of the heliostats are focused on standby points, four small areas (approximate diameter = 5 m) of sky around the tower at a height of 80 m. Temperatures within the standby points vary with the number of heliostats focused on them and the reflectivity of an object placed within them, but the temperature can be high enough to burn feathers and small insects.

Solar One is located in the Mojave Desert, 4 km east of Daggett, San Bernardino County, California (34°52'N, 116°51'W). The dominant desert plant community in this area is creosote bush (*Larrea divaricata*) scrub, although abandoned and active agricultural fields (alfalfa) and extensive (53 ha) evaporation ponds (Fig. 1) are adjacent to Solar One.

We visited Solar One approximately once per week (2–3 days per visit) on 6 occasions from 3 May through 8 June 1982 and on 34 occasions from 16 September 1982 through May 1983. During each visit 1–2 observers searched the facility for any evidence of bird mortality. Although searches were not conducted in a fixed pattern, the entire facility was covered during each visit. Bird carcasses were readily found because of the sparse vegetation and level ground of Solar One. Experiments involving the placement of 19 bird carcasses of various species within and just outside (<200 m) the fenced facility were conducted in May and September 1982 to measure the rate of bird carcass removal by scavengers. These carcasses were checked periodically until removed by scavengers or decomposed.

FIGURE 1. Aerial view of Solar One: (A) heliostat field, (B) central receiver tower, (C) evaporation ponds. Tower height = 86 m, diameter of field = 765 m.

To determine the impact of bird mortality on local populations, 1–2 observers conducted surveys of relative avian abundance within an area of approximately 150 ha surrounding Solar One, concentrating on the facility grounds (32 ha), evaporation ponds, and agricultural fields. These surveys were conducted on at least 2 d per visit for 3–4 h/d.

RESULTS

Solar One related animal mortality.—During approximately 40 wks of study, we documented 70 bird fatalities involving 26 species at Solar One (Table 1). The mean rate of mortality between visits was 1.7 birds ± 1.8 SD (n = 40, range 0–7). Results of the scavenger bias experiments indicate that from 10–30% of carcasses were removed between searches, thus, the actual rate of mortality may have been from 1.9–2.2 birds. Two causes of avian mortality were identified at Solar One, colliding with structures and burning from standby points.

The most frequent form of avian mortality was from collisions with Solar One structures. We documented 57 (81%) bird deaths (20 species) from collisions (Table 1). In most cases the cause of death was determined by the presence of broken bones (usually mandibles or wings) found through external examination. From the location of birds in relation to structures, most (>75%) died from colliding with the mirrored heliostats, although a dead Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*) with a broken wing was found on a platform of the receiver tower. On one occasion

TABLE 1. Avian mortality from burning and collisions at Solar One, 1982–1983.

Burn fatalities		Collision fatalities	
Species	Number of individuals	Species	Number of individuals
Vaux's Swift (*Chaetura vauxi*)	1	Eared Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*)	11
White-throated Swift (*Aeronautes saxatalis*)	2	Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*)	1
Hummingbird sp.	3	American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*)	1
Cliff Swallow (*Hirundo pyrrhonota*)	2	American Coot (*Fulica americana*)	2
Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)	1	Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*)	2
Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)	1	Sandpiper sp.	1
Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Dendroica coronata*)	1	Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*)	1
Wilson's Warbler (*Wilsonia pusilla*)	1	Bonaparte's Gull (*Larus philadelphia*)	1
Sparrow sp.	1	Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*)	6
		Hummingbird sp.	1
		Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris*)	3
		European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)	4
		Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Dendroica coronata*)	1
		MacGillivray's Warbler (*Oporornis tolmiei*)	1
		Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)	3
		White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*)	2
		Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis*)	1
		Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)	3
		Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*)	1
		Yellow-headed Blackbird (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*)	2
		Brewer's Blackbird (*Euphagas cyanocephalus*)	5
		House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*)	4
Total	13	Total	57

in May 1982 a Solar One employee observed 4 Mourning Doves (*Zenaida macroura*) die in a collision with a single heliostat.

Thirteen (19%) birds (7 species) died from burning in the standby points (Table 1). Although we never observed a bird fly through one of

the standby points, the heavily singed flight and contour feathers indicated that the birds burned to death (Fig. 2). Six (46%) of these fatalities involved aerial foragers (swifts and swallows) which are apparently more susceptible to this form of mortality because of their feeding behavior. Three of these aerial foragers died during a 2-wk period in May 1982, corresponding with the presence of the highest numbers of swifts and swallows observed (>500 per d), and an extensive period of heliostat testing when the occurrence and intensity of standby points was probably greater than at other times.

Relative avian abundance.—During 102 d from May–June 1982 (18 d) and September 1982–May 1983 (84 d), we recorded 107 bird species (daily mean = 16.7 ± 6.1 SD, n = 102) in the immediate area (150 ha) of Solar One. The mean daily count for individuals was 314 ± 203 SD (range 148–1040). Most avian species recorded at Solar One were migrants and only 15 species are year-round residents, with Horned Larks (*Eremophila alpestris*), European Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*), and House Finches (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) the most common breeding birds.

Of the habitats surveyed in this study, the evaporation ponds were the most heavily used by birds. Seventy percent of all species were recorded at least once at the ponds, and 45% were recorded only at the ponds; the majority of daily counts recorded mostly waterbirds.

DISCUSSION

Creosote bush scrub, which characterizes much of the undisturbed portions of the Mojave Desert near Solar One, is usually only sparsely inhabited by birds. The avian community of similar habitat in Arizona is usually less than 20 species (Tomoff, Ecology 55:396–403, 1974). However, we recorded 107 species in the vicinity of Solar One, 15 of which breed in the area. The special attraction of Solar One to birds is most likely related to the presence of a large, man-made water impoundment and irrigated agricultural fields, both of which produce an abundance of insects. Naturally occurring open water sources in the Mojave Desert are rare and usually ephemeral, while the man-made ponds near Solar One are permanent.

The most frequent form of avian mortality at Solar One during this study was from collisions with structures, primarily heliostats. Avian collisions are an inevitable by-product of almost all man-made structures (see Avery et al., FWS/OBS-80/54, 1980). Reflective surfaces are especially prone to collisions (Klem, Ph.D. thesis, Southern Illinois Univ., Carbondale, 1979), and it is not surprising that collisions with mirrored heliostats occur on a somewhat regular basis considering the reflective surface area of Solar One.

A form of avian mortality unique to solar central receiver power plants is burning in standby points. Death after being burned was infrequent in occurrence at Solar One, being in part a function of the frequent absence and variable intensity of standby points and the number of aerial foragers (swifts and swallows) in the airspace over Solar One.

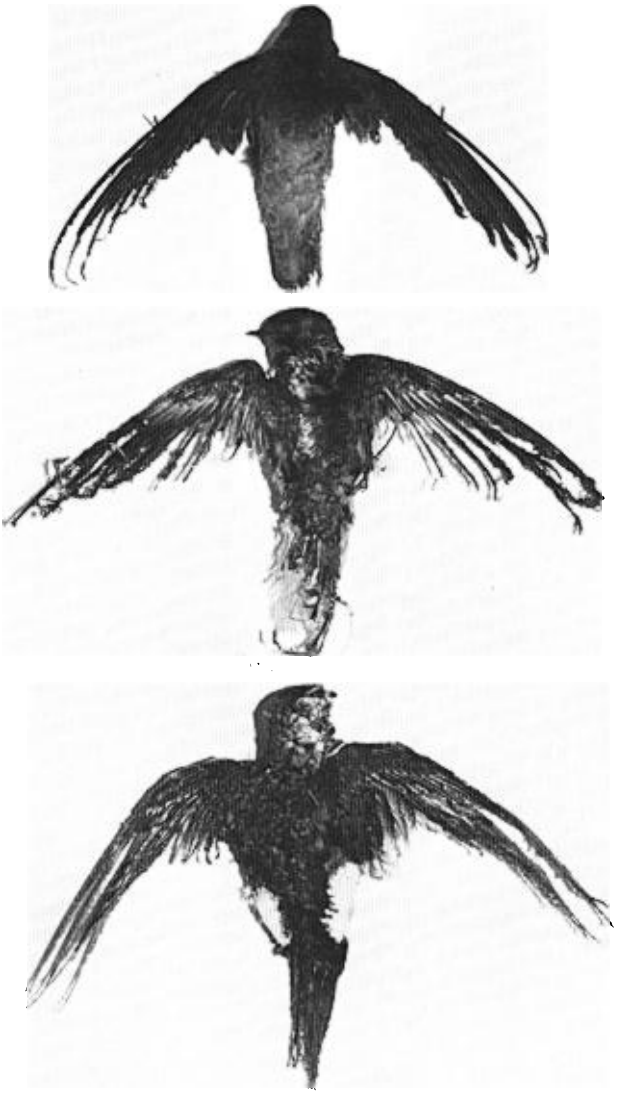

FIGURE 2. Three birds burned in standby points at Solar One. Top to bottom: Vaux's Swift (*Chaetura vauxi*), Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*), and White-throated Swift (*Aeronautes saxatalis*). Note the heavily singed rectrices and remiges especially in the Barn Swallow.

Considering all known avian fatalities (70 birds) at Solar One during this study the impact of the facility on birds after construction appears minimal. Comparing the estimated rate of mortality (1.9–2.2 birds per wk) and mean relative avian abundance (314 birds per count) recorded in the vicinity of Solar One, only 0.6–0.7% of the local population present at any given time may have been affected during this study. The effect on the total population using the region in a year is obviously much less, but is unestimatable.

The results of this study suggest that, to reduce their impact on birds, future solar central receiver power plants in the Mojave Desert and other areas should not be sited in close proximity to open water or agricultural fields. The variety of species involved in avian mortality at Solar One indicates that caution should be taken when siting a solar power plant near populations of rare, threatened, or endangered species. If possible, the occurrence and intensity of standby points should be kept to a minimum. Since Solar One is only a 10 megawatt pilot facility, future projects designed to produce hundreds of megawatts will require several thousand heliostats and much taller receiver towers. The greater magnitude of these facilities may produce non-linear increases in the rate of avian mortality when compared to Solar One and extrapolations from this study should be made with caution. The removal of large tracts of desert from biological production for solar power generation and the ecological effects caused thereby should also be of concern.

SUMMARY

We studied avian mortality at an operating solar central receiver power plant in the Mojave Desert of southern California. During 40 wks of study we documented the deaths of 70 birds (26 species). The estimated mortality rate was 1.9–2.2 birds per week. Fifty-seven (81%) birds of 20 species died from collisions with Solar One structures, mainly the mirrored surfaces of heliostats. Thirteen (19%) birds (7 species) died from burns received by flying through standby points. The impact of this mortality on the local bird population is considered minimal (0.6–0.7% per wk).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, Section of Ornithology, 900 Exposition Blvd., Los Angeles, California 90007 (MDM, RLM, RWS, WDW); *Southern California Edison Company, Research and Development, P.O. Box 800, Rosemead, California 91770* (TCS). Received 1 Oct. 1985; accepted 24 Jan. 1986.

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March 6, 2020

GTS # 04-ALA-2020-00513
GTS ID: 18642
ALA/61/PM 18.34

Henry Dong, Planner III
City of Alameda Planning,
Building and Transportation Department
2263 Santa Clara Avenue, Room 190
Alameda, California 94501

Alameda Municipal Power Solar Project – Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND)

Dear Henry Dong:

Thank you for including the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) in the environmental review process for the Alameda Municipal Power Solar Project. We are committed to ensuring that impacts to the State's multimodal transportation system and to our natural environment are identified and mitigated to support a safe, sustainable, integrated and efficient transportation system. The following comments are based on our review of the January 2020 IS/MND.

Project Understanding

Alameda Municipal Power proposes to construct and operate a photovoltaic solar facility on the approximately 33.2-acre Doolittle Class III landfill site. The solar panels would be placed on 11.2 acres of the site which is bounded to the north by San Leandro Bay, to the south and west by State Route (SR)-61/Doolittle Drive, and to the east by Martin Luther King Jr. Regional Shoreline Park.

Hydraulics

From the existing plan (attached), there is a 42-inch diameter reinforced concrete pipe (RCP) that runs across the center of the proposed project and is about 620 feet in length. This culvert should be identified and confirmed to not conflict with the solar panel footings or piles.

Landscape Architecture/Visual Resources
The IS/MND analyzes the potential aesthetic impacts from Doolittle Drive/SR-61 looking north towards the site. As mentioned in the document, the topography and existing trees will screen views of the project from this location. Caltrans recommends that an arborist be consulted to ensure that proper tree protection measures be taken for the trees along Doolittle Drive.

Additionally, the project site is visible from the Bay Farm Island Bridge (San Leandro Bay Bridge). Caltrans recommends that visual studies of the proposed solar panel layout should be conducted from a bridge driver and bicyclist viewpoint. If the site allows, consider planting trees on the north slope of the project site to partially screen the panels from a northern vantage point.

San Francisco Bay Trail
The San Francisco Bay Trail borders the northern and eastern edges of the project site. Caltrans recommends that the trail system should be protected during construction and that the East Bay Regional Park District be included as a reviewer of this project.

Lead Agency
As the Lead Agency, the City of Alameda is responsible for all project mitigation, including any needed improvements to the State Transportation Network (STN). The project's fair share contribution, financing, scheduling, implementation responsibilities and lead agency monitoring should be fully discussed for all proposed mitigation measures.

Encroachment Permit
Please be advised that any work or traffic control that encroaches onto the State right-of-way (ROW) requires a Caltrans-issued encroachment permit, which includes any potential modifications to driveways on SR-61.

To obtain an encroachment permit, a completed encroachment permit application, environmental documentation, six (6) sets of plans clearly indicating the State ROW, and six (6) copies of signed, dated and stamped (include stamp expiration date) traffic control plans must be submitted to: Office of Encroachment Permits, Caltrans District 4, P.O. Box 23660, Oakland, CA 94623-0660. To download the permit application and obtain more information, visit https://dot.ca.gov/programs/traffic-operations/ep/applications.

Thank you again for including Caltrans in the environmental review process. Should you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Andrew Chan at 510-622-5433 or andrew.chan@dot.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Mark Leong
District Branch Chief
Local Development - Intergovernmental Review

City of Alameda
Web Map

2/24/2020

100m
400ft
122° 13' 48.429" 37° 44' 52.011" Scale 1:4,237

The City of Alameda does not guarantee the information contained in this map to be an accurate representation of actual existing conditions.